Mr. President, as we gather in the Senate for this

session today, there will be no recorded votes, but an important vote

is scheduled to take place across the Rotunda. We know what that vote

is about. It is about a war that is now in its fourth year, a war that

has lasted longer than World War II.

We were told recently that advisers to the President told him that at

this stage of the war, there would be as few as 5,000 American troops

in Iraq maintaining the limited interests that will remain for the

United States. The reality is so much different. Over 130,000 Americans

troops are still there for the fourth year of this war. We are

activating Guard units, Reserve units, and redeploying those in active

military

with a frequency we have not seen since the great wars we faced in our

past. We are asking sacrifices from these men and women in uniform and

their families far beyond what was anticipated when the President 4

years ago convinced a majority of the House and Senate to vote to go to

war.

The cost of this war, in human terms, is devastating: 3,132 of

America's best and bravest soldiers have died. Over 23,000 have

returned seriously injured. Many will come back and need help in

reconstructing their lives, their families, their homes, their

businesses. They have paid a sacrifice, all of them, and we owe them

all a great debt of gratitude for their service to our country.

The President has decided the next stage of the war is to increase

the number of American troops who will be cast into the midst of this

civil war. It has been characterized as a civil war now by our national

intelligence agencies. In fact, they say it is far worse than civil

war. The report they have given to Congress, the National Intelligence

Through hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, we have

learned that the fundamentals of a civil society do not exist in Iraq

today. The basics--police protection, enforcement of the law,

prosecution of criminals, incarceration of those who have been found

guilty--all of these things are at issue in this country. Yet the

President believes we should invest more and more American lives in

that war. I believe that is a tragic error. That is my opinion. It is

being debated in the House of Representatives, and they will reach a

conclusion this afternoon, likely the same conclusion I have, that this

is a wrong strategy.

It has been an interesting and historic debate in the House. Members

have been allowed the time to stand and speak their minds and speak

from the heart about this grave challenge we face in America. What we

are asking for on the floor of the Senate is the same opportunity as

the House of Representatives. We believe that this, characterized as

America's greatest deliberative body, should not avoid the

responsibility of debate. We believe this policy of the President,

which is being discussed and debated across America in towns large and

small, should be discussed and debated on the floor of the Senate.

The press made note this morning that the Senate is going to meet in

a rare Saturday session. Well, we may be coming together on Saturday to

do our job, but people across America are coming together on Saturdays

to do their jobs, and our soldiers are going to war on Saturday to do

their job. We will have a chance tomorrow, early in the afternoon, to

decide whether the Senate will take up this same debate; whether the

American people will have a chance, through their elected Senators, to

speak on this issue, this life and death issue.

I am hoping we will have a better result than we did 2 weeks ago. We

brought this matter up before the Senate. We asked to have a debate. In

fact, we said: We will take--on the Democratic majority side, we will

allow two Republican amendments to be offered, one from Senator Warner

of Virginia, which questions the President's policies; the other from

Senator McCain of Arizona, who believes that the escalation is a good

policy--a sharp contrast, a real choice, an honest, straightforward

debate leading to a yes or no--and that was rejected because, you see,

the other side does not want us to come down to that basic, fundamental

question. They want us to go into a debate about so many other issues,

albeit important issues but not directly related to this policy.

Yesterday, the majority leader in the Senate, Harry Reid of the State

of Nevada, offered again to the Republican side the basic choice, a

straightforward choice. We will bring to the floor the resolution that

is presently being debated in the House of Representatives which

objects to the escalation of forces, and we will allow Senator McCain,

who has an opposite view, who wants to send more troops into Iraq, we

will allow those two to be considered and Members to make a choice. I

don't think you could ask for anything fairer. But unfortunately, the

minority, the Republican minority insisted they wanted to add two or

three more amendments into the mix.

Well, clearly, that takes the focus off the most important issue;

that is, should we send more American soldiers into this wretched civil

war in Iraq today. I think we need to face that responsibility and face

that vote. Now, some will step back and say: Wait. If the Democrats are

in the majority, why don't they debate this issue?

Well, the rules of the Senate are interesting. They are designed to

protect a minority. They give the minority in America and the minority

in the Senate a voice which it may not have in other places. So under

the rules of the Senate, it takes 60 Members to vote to move forward to

debate an issue--60. We have 50, with Senator Johnson recuperating;

they have 49. So in order to move to a debate, we need 10 Senators to

cross this aisle and join us, cooperate with us, on a bipartisan basis,

so we can move forward on this debate. Tomorrow will be the test.

Now, I have heard some Senators on the other side say: We are not

even going to show up tomorrow. We are not going to be here. I hope

that is idle chatter and doesn't reflect their intentions.

I believe the vote tomorrow is critically important. We are summoning

Democratic Senators from all across the United States, literally. Some

are making personal sacrifices, having flown home, believing we had

ended the session, and flying back, many of them all-night flights, to

be here. They understand the importance and gravity of this vote. I

certainly hope the Members on the other side feel the same way. This is

an important vote. It is not just another procedural vote. America will

notice who is here tomorrow and who votes, and America will notice,

after this historic debate in the House of Representatives, whether we

meet our important constitutional responsibility.

A lot of people argue they have given up on Government. Government

doesn't mean much to them anymore, and they don't have a great high

regard for the people who are in Government. Some of these folks have

stopped voting. They don't get involved. They go about their normal

lives and say: Those politicians, you know, they talk a lot and they

don't do much.

Well, this is a time when I think we can dispel some of this feeling

across America that we are irrelevant and not part of things. If we

can't take the time to spend on the floor of the Senate, as people are

across America, debating this war, then we have lost our way. We have

to bring this matter before the American people in the right way. We

are fighting for a democracy in the Middle East. We are fighting for a

democracy in Iraq. Democracy is the open debate of public issues. Will

we have that same debate on the Senate floor? That question is in the

hands of the Republican minority. They will decide tomorrow whether we

move forward on this debate.

Now, there is one group in this town who does not want this debate to

move forward; let's be very honest about it: the President and the

White House. It is an embarrassment to have your policy rejected and

repudiated by bipartisan votes in the House and Senate, and it is rare.

It hardly ever happens. So to spare the embarrassment to the White

House--the political embarrassment--some are trying to stop this debate

in the Senate. But I have to say I think this issue goes far beyond

which politician ends up with bragging rights. That has nothing to do

with it. This has to do with the lives and fortunes of our servicemen

and their families and this great Nation and our foreign policy.

At a time when we need to gather allies around the world to fight

this war on terrorism, when we need to bring nations together to join

us as they did after September 11 to stop the spread of terrorism, we

need to understand this debate on Iraq is right on point. It is a

debate which affects hundreds of thousands of soldiers and their

families, and it affects all of us as Americans.

I sincerely hope the Republican minority will have a change of heart,

will join us in supporting this debate tomorrow. I believe we will find

tomorrow, with this vote, that a bipartisan majority of the Senate

wants to move forward with a debate. If it doesn't

reach the number of 60, then technically this debate cannot move

forward. I use the word ``technically'' because in honesty, that will

not be the end if we do not muster 60 votes. This matter is going to

come before the Senate again and again and again.

For 4 years in this war, Congress, controlled by the other party, has

been virtually silent on the issue of this war and the wisdom of our

policy. Those days are over. In the last few weeks we have been in

session, we have had over 30 hearings by committees that have asked the

hard questions about this policy, about protecting our troops, and

about where we are going to go forward in the future. Those questions

will continue to be asked by committees. They will continue to be

addressed in the Senate. When we move to the next item of legislation,

we will undoubtedly have amendments relative to this war in Iraq. This

debate will not end.

I sincerely hope those on the other side of the aisle will join us. I

hope they understand what is at stake. It is not just 21,000 more

soldiers putting their lives on the line for America; it is a question

of our foreign policy and protecting this Nation and making sure we

keep our commitment to our country to keep it safe.